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ABSTRACT

Reading and writing teachers can use visual compositions--a grouping of pictures, photos, or slides suggesting a unified story or theme--to help students understand style and organization in writing. Students who are categorized as language deficient, have difficulty with invention, or are influenced in language learning by visual/spatial input are likely to benefit most from visual stories. During the first visual presentation, students should be asked to write a thematic sentence expressing a central meaning and providing a point of view for their developing theme. During the second viewing, students should write individual sentences based on each picture. Once students understand the relationship between a particular organizational structure and their own writing, they can read assignments organized in a similar way. The reading selection will be easier to visualize since students can now compare it to a concrete referent in their experience. The visual composition arrangements provide both concrete experiences to stimulate student writing and a nonverbal means of teaching the internal structure of discourse. (An outline illustrating how seven visual composition arrangements can influence the writing and understanding of corresponding styles in written language is included.) (HTH)

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VISUAL COMPOSITIONS AND THE WRITING PROCESS

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Teachers of reading and writing can use visual compositions to help older students achieve understanding of style and organization in writing. A visual composition is a grouping of pictures, photos, or slides which suggests a unified story or theme. Any life experience that can be captured in pictures can provide subject matter for a visual composition. As Eckhardt noted (1977), there is scarcely a subject of school study that cannot be expressed visually. The objective in structuring a visual story is to influence student writers to compose and write their verbal stories in an organized way. Generally, teachers can organize visual stories to parallel the structure of the four traditional modes of written discourse-narration, description, exposition, and argumentation (Sinatra, 1980).

Visual compositions can be prepared a number of different ways. Teachers can photograph their own visual stories or they can train students in how to use the camera to create photo essays (Debes, 1975; Collins, 1980). The combination of shooting pictures, acting out preset roles, and verbalizing about the visual experience helped second language learners make solid reading progress in one program described by Debes and Williams (1974).

Single pictures and picture sequences drawn from newspapers, magazines, brochures, and textual sources can also provide stimulating illustrations for visual stories. Popular magazines such as Life, National Geographic, or Sports Illustrated generally portray a number of pictures that relate to one central theme. The cut-out pictures can be arranged and rearranged to tell stories in different ways. Ads can be used to show students how decisions they must make in their writing are similar to the choices that advertising copywriters make in promoting products and convincing audiences to buy them (McQuade, 1976). However, preparing visual compositions from slide sequences is my favorite way to involve an entire class group in the same concrete experience. Projecting slide stories capitalizes on the movie-type format, immediately engages the curiosity of the viewer, and will motivate even the most reluctant writer.

How Visual Compositions Influence Students

While visual stories will generate written expression from all levels of students, two types benefit most from their use. The first type is the one who has been categorized as language deficient and who has difficulty in conceptualizing or imagining what to write about. The visuals provide a concrete glimpse of life that the student can match with his/her own verbal account. When the visual story has been translated into a verbal one, the language-deficient student demonstrates that a language facility exists. The visual composition has provided a holistic means of conceptualizing a theme and a way of eliciting and organizing a written paper. The advantage of using "silent" sequences of pictures rather than film with accompanying dialogue is that students don't imitate a language source but compose their own logical, written stories with their own words and sentence structures.

The second type of student who benefits from visual composing is the one who is influenced in the learning of language through visual/

spatial input, a functional specialization of the brain's right hemisphere. This is undoubtedly due to the influence of the media in conditioning an image-centered view of the world (Postman, 1979), and to our ever increasing knowledge of how right hemisphere competent learners use the right rather than the left hemisphere for semantic processing (Bannatayne, 1971).

The left brain for most learners is the seat of language specialization. However, recent research suggests that some bilingual groups (Ramirez and Casteneda, 1974), urban, inner-city groups (Cohen, 1969; Lesser, 1971), and bright youngsters with unexplained reading and writing failures (Symmes and Rapoport, 1972) show strengths in visual-spatial tasks and holistic modes or processing. Bannatayne (1971) pointed out that for some people, mostly males, the visuo-spatial brain operates as an executive control center over the whole brain including language functioning. Since picture viewing is an activity specialized for right brain processing, picture usage insures that visuospatial competent learners are not denied equal cognitive opportunity in achieving literacy.

A key strategy in the use of visual compositions is that pictures provide concrete stimuli for the formation of imagery. Imagery, the mental representation of the picture story once the pictures have been shown and removed from view, is recalled more powerfully and more rapidly than words and can provide a means for evoking verbal labels (Paivio, 1971). Haber (1970) showed in his experiments that the capacity for recalling pictures was virtually unlimited and suggested that linguistic recall might dramatically improve if techniques could be found to attach words to visual images. Since imagery is also a function of the right brain and is an important element in the production of creativity, an educational challenge of our modern era is to educate both halves of the brain to stimulate creativity in young people (Gowan, 1978). The use of visual compositions provide a way of achieving cooperation between hemispheric processing while encouraging imagery to aid linguistic recall.

Four Stages of Visual/Verbal Integration

Figure 1. shows that four interlocking stages of visual/verbal literacy occur with the use of each visual composition and indicates the processing mode achieved during each stage. Receptive processing of visual/verbal input occurs during viewing and reading, while expressive language processing occurs during the composing and writing stages. The sequence of the stages also suggests that comprehending a style of discourse is a direct function of active involvement in viewing, composing, and writing that particular style.

Figure 1. Stages of Visual/Verbal Literacy Achieved with Visual Compositions

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Viewing ⟶	Composing ⟶	Writing ⟶	Reading
non verbal receptive input	Visualizing holistic meaning and coupling images with language	Expressing style and organization by applying written language code	Comprehending style and organization by reconstructing language code

During the viewing stage, students see a series of pictures that have been arranged to tell a story in a particular way. Generally, two showings of each visual composition are necessary to develop both global understanding and sentence level relationships of stages two and three. During the first visual presentation, students sense the contribution of each picture to the development of a unified theme. They should be asked to compose and write a thematic sentence which expresses that central meaning and which provides a point-of-view for their developing theme. During the second viewing of the visual story, students can write individual sentences based on each picture. The important visual/verbal strategy to impart to students is the notion that as each picture contributed a thread of meaning to the visual composition, so each sentence should relate to the central idea expressed in the thematic sentence. A common grammar appears to underlie both verbal production of sentences and imaginal production of visualized scenes (Bower, 1972). Thus, composing and writing interact as recalled images provide concrete experiences for sentence and theme construction.

Finally, reading can be strengthened as an outcome of the visual/writing interaction. Stage four suggests that particular styles of written discourse will become easier to comprehend since students have been actively involved in the construction of that style. After viewing and writing a theme organized a particular way (see Figure 2.), students can read each others papers or single papers can be projected on the overhead. They can be asked to determine if papers captured the organizational style of the visual arrangement. Sentences can be abstracted from a number of papers that form a model for that organizational style. Through discussion and the sharing of each other's written accounts, students will recognize the organizational structure which underlies visual/verbal discourse. In essence, the four stage process stresses involvement and interaction insuring that the structure of the subject is meshed with the structure of the student (Moffett, 1968).

Once students understand the relationship between a particular organizational structure and their own writing, they can be given reading assignments that are organized in a similar way. The reading selection will be easier to visualize since students can now compare it to a concrete referent in their experience. Levin (1973) felt that visual imagining aided the organizational strategies of poor readers because they unconsciously integrated verbal and visual input. He had asked readers strong in word recognition ability but poor in organizational skills to imagine a picture for each sentence in a story. They scored 40% higher on a comprehension test than did a control group of similar disabled readers who read the story alone.

Visual Composition Arrangements and Writing Styles

The following figure illustrates that seven visual composition arrangements can influence the writing and understanding of corresponding styles in the written language. Visual arrangements can contain any number of pictures or slides. I use sets of two or more slides when focusing on the comparison/contrast technique in writing and as many as 30 slides when developing a colorful, narrative account of the annual student vs. faculty softball game. Visual composition arrangements reflect the way that themes and pictures can be structured while writing style indicates the way that most students will model their written discourse.

Figure 2. Relationship of Visual Compositions to Written Style and Organization

Visual Composition Arrangements	Writing Style Achieved
Show events in a sequence or steps involved in a process. All sports events, contests, adventures, and process-oriented activities show action occurring in sequence.	Narrative and Sequential Ordering of Events Narrative and process-oriented construction develops in which the unifying element is time-order or sequence. The writer focuses on sequential telling of events. During initial writing activities, it is helpful to provide students with transition words and phrases that carry the direction of thought forward.
Present a descriptive scene in which each picture contributes a little more detail to how the scene is organized. Live and inanimate objects could be arranged along horizontal, vertical or distance planes.	Description The writer describes the scene and arranges features in relation to each other. Connectives that relate spatial orientation will help students coordinate the positioning of characters, objects, and details within scenes.
Show how likenesses and differences exist amongst people, events, and surroundings. Styles of dress, eating habits, housing conditions are easy to compare and contrast in visual arrangements.	Comparison/Contrast Students write about similarities and differences they see occurring in the picture presentation and learn the comparison/contrast style of organization. Presenting coordinating conjunctions which signal contrast will aid students in the development of that style.
Show a picture that presents a group or class and then a number of pictures which illustrate examples of that class. For instance, show the group pose of an athletic team and then each member of that team at his/her position.	Enumeration or Development by Example Students will name the group to which the separate items belong and then develop each separate item in ensuing sentences.

Imply that something happened as a result of something else or that a problem exists. Focus on the central idea and include enough pictures to develop that idea. For instance, by showing a developing storm or hurricane and then the damage resulting from that storm, a cause and effect relationship is visually portrayed. A visual problem can also be suggested with a number of pictures to show how that problem was resolved.

Exposition

A number of expository patterns may be developed here, i.e., cause and effect, problem/solution, and development by main idea with supporting details. Sequential arrangement may be featured in the writing style while development of the theme occurs.

Focus on characters who appear to be involved in a controversy or highlight one character who seems to be persuading another to act a certain way.

Argumentation

The student uses the style of argumentation or persuasion in developing the composition. Specific reasons may be noted in the details. A dialogue may be written between characters outlining the points of the argument or controversy.

Combine visual arrangements to achieve a more detailed visual story. For instance, the sequence of an event can be shown while additional pictures can highlight the surroundings or locale in which one part of the event occurred.

Combination of Styles

Several writing styles may be achieved. Narrative-descriptive writing is rather easy to achieve. Students tell the particular story in sequential fashion while stopping to describe places or scenes in which the action occurred.

To assist students in the development of a particular writing style, I often provide them with lists of connector words and transitional phrases which are appropriate to that visual/verbal arrangement. The words can be distributed after they have completed the two viewings of the visual composition and have begun to write the verbal account. The connectives help them organize relationships perceived in the visual presentation and to achieve smooth coordination between sentences.

For instance, to aid narrative and sequential writing, it is helpful to provide students with transition words and phrases, such as "next... meanwhile... furthermore... besides... in addition to... therefore... consequently" which carry the direction of thought forward. Spatial connectors such as "nearby... across... above... below... here" help students organize features within descriptive scenes and relate details in proximity to each other. Coordinating conjunctions such as "but... however... although" will help students contrast ideas. In another source, the most frequent connector words in the written language have been arranged to parallel their use in picture story presentations (Sinatra, 1981).

Using visual compositions will involve students in writing and comprehending processes while achieving whole brain input in literacy development. Composing is aided by the use of organized visual stories which help students conceptualize a unified theme. Providing connector words with particular visual themes will further assist students in visualizing relationships and connecting ideas in writing. The visual composition arrangements provide both concrete experiences to stimulate student writing and a non-verbal means of teaching the internal structure of discourse.

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